

IN THE CLAIMS

The following is a complete list of the claims now pending; this replaces all earlier versions and listings of the claims. Please amend claims 1-7, 16, and 19 as follows.

1. ~~(Currently Amended) An image processing A method for extracting a pixel value characteristic of adapted for setting an area in a radiation image obtained by radiographing an object, comprising the steps of:~~
- ~~a deleting step, of deleting a passing through area from said the radiation image;~~
- ~~a preparing step, of preparing a projection of the image obtained in said deleting step; and~~
- ~~a setting step, of setting a characteristic an area, from which the pixel value characteristic is obtained, of said in the radiation image based on said the projection.~~
2. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 1, further comprising a binarizing step; of binarizing the image obtained in said deleting step, wherein in said preparing step, the projection of said the binarized image is prepared.
3. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein in said preparing step, a weighting processing is performed in accordance with based on a pixel value of the image.

4. ~~(Currently Amended)~~ A method according to claim 1, wherein in said preparing step, a weighting processing is performed ~~in accordance with~~ based on a pixel position of the image.

5. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein in said setting step, ~~said characteristic~~ the area is set based on secondary difference values of ~~said the~~ projection.

6. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein ~~said the~~ object ~~comprises~~ includes a cervical vertebra.

7. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 1, ~~wherein said~~ pixel value characteristic extracted from said characteristic area is used to perform a gradation conversion processing further comprising the steps of:

extracting a pixel value characteristic from the area; and

performing a gradation conversion processing of the radiation image

based on the pixel value characteristic.

8-15 (Withdrawn)

16. ~~(Currently Amended) An image processing apparatus for extracting a pixel value characteristic of~~ adapted for setting an area in a radiation image obtained by radiographing an object, comprising:

a deleting means for deleting unit, adapted to delete a passing through area from said the radiation image;

a preparing means for preparing unit, adapted to prepare a projection of the image obtained by said deleting means unit; and

a setting means for setting unit, adapted to set a characteristic area, from which the pixel value characteristic is obtained, of said an area in the radiation image based on said the projection.

17, 18. (Withdrawn)

19. (Amended) A storage medium for storing ~~an image processing a~~ program for extracting a pixel value characteristic of which includes code for causing a computer to execute steps of a method adapted for setting an area in a radiation image obtained by radiographing an object, ~~said program the method comprising the codes for the steps of:~~

~~a deleting step, of deleting~~ a passing through area from said the radiation image;

~~a preparing step, of preparing~~ a projection of the image obtained in said deleting step; and

~~a setting step, of setting a characteristic an area, from which the pixel~~

~~value characteristic is obtained, of said in the radiation image based on said the projection.~~

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20-33. (Withdrawn)